

THE MAGAZINE FOR COMMUNICATORS & LEADERS | FEBRUARY 2019

# TOASTMASTER®



## *The Paths Less Traveled*

Humanitarians speak out and lead in service of the greater good



**Designed to Deliver:  
Unpacking Pathways**

**Bilingualism and the Brain**

## The Value of Personal Connections



In my travels with Toastmasters, I have visited golden meetings and not-so-golden meetings, and I've learned a great deal from both.

In quality meetings, every detail has been coordinated in advance. The meetings run efficiently with every meeting role filled; officers communicate the meeting theme to members in advance, and Table Topics questions are not so challenging as to intimidate visitors. Quality clubs ensure not only that speakers are prepared but that their evaluators are too.

Most importantly, quality clubs ensure that every member gains competence in support of their personal and professional goals. That level of accountability to each individual member doesn't happen without strong personal connections. In our digital age, we take for granted that every digital correspondence is read, understood and processed. In many cases, we have lost the personal touch. So, despite busy lives and full meeting agendas, I urge you not to forget the most valuable connection—the personal one.

District 87 Director Liana Kwan, DTM, of Medan, Indonesia, reminded me that relationships are a priceless benefit of Toastmasters. Do you begin with the value of relationships? If you're a club officer, do you personally connect with each member before the meeting to ensure they understand their roles and importance in delivering a quality meeting experience?

**“Despite busy lives and full meeting agendas, I urge you not to forget the most valuable connection—the personal one.”**

Ask yourself whether all members have the opportunity to learn and have fun. At the conclusion of your meeting, consider each member and how likely they are to look forward to future meetings as more opportunities to connect and grow their skills.

Planning a quality club meeting takes time and effort. Each club officer has a hand in ensuring that every club meeting is golden. And, as speakers and audience members, each club member plays a part in the execution of a fun and lively meeting.

The value of Toastmasters may be different for each of us, but it begins with a personal connection to the members of our club. We reap the benefits of Toastmasters when we learn and respect each individual's goals and do our best to support each other. Let's take the time to connect.

**Lark Doley, DTM**  
International President

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We empower individuals to become more effective communicators and leaders.



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Members in Shanghai, Sri Lanka and South Africa show off their Toastmasters spirit.



Club officers of Shanghai Xujiahui Toastmasters practice team building at Shanghai Disney Resort in Pudong, Shanghai, China.



Members of Cargills Bank Toastmasters, a corporate club in Colombo, Sri Lanka, strike a pose at their officer installation ceremony.



Members of Randburg Toastmasters in Johannesburg, South Africa, celebrate their 45th anniversary.



**Send your fun club photos to [photos@toastmasters.org](mailto:photos@toastmasters.org).** Include a description and your club name, number and location. Photos must be in jpeg format with a resolution of at least 300 dpi (dots per inch) and size of at least 1 MB (megabyte). Out-of-focus images cannot be accepted. It is not necessary to include the Toastmaster magazine or other branded materials in your photos, but if Toastmasters materials are displayed, they must reflect the current brand.

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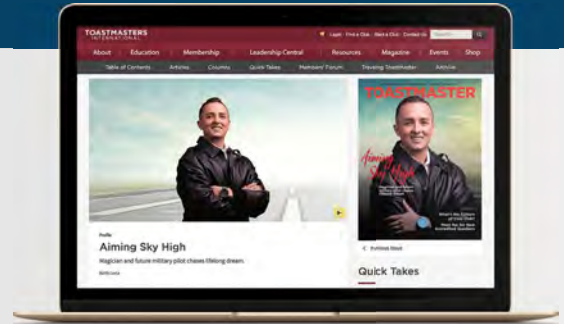


# Toastmaster Magazine Online

See more photos, videos and links online at [www.toastmasters.org/Magazine](http://www.toastmasters.org/Magazine)

## February Online Extras:

- **The Paths Less Traveled**—View additional photos of humanitarian Toastmasters giving back around the globe. 📷
- **Designed to Deliver**—Watch a video to discover how Pathways is enhancing the learning experience of members. ▶
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## ▶ STAFF MOMENT



## Spotlight on WHQ's Finance Team

### Staff excels at budgeting and district support.

While Toastmasters officers all over the world are busy running their clubs and districts, employees in the Finance department at World Headquarters are hard at work supporting those clubs and districts with a range of financial services.

With approximately 700,000 dues renewals to process each year, as well as 240 district bank accounts to manage and more than 16,000 clubs throughout the world to support, this group of financial experts is busy year-round. In addition to maintaining the organization's 501(c)(3) nonprofit status and focusing on lowering operating costs, the department addresses issues related to three subgroups—financial reporting, district accounting and tax and regulation.

Led by chief financial officer John Bond, CPA (Vermont), the Finance department is made up of 12 team members who have accounting and other financial related experience. Bond says, “Members join Toastmasters to become better communicators and leaders, not to become accountants. Our job is to help make their financial processing and reporting easier.” The department supports the operations of Toastmasters International in areas such as financial policy interpretation, accounts payable and receivable and vendor relations. It also assists with dues-renewal payments, supply orders, tax filing for U.S.-based clubs, and setting up club bank accounts in countries where this proves challenging. Using a multi-currency, cloud-based accounting system, the Finance team supports district leaders and treasurers with managing district funds and distributing reimbursements.

The Finance team faces a unique set of challenges, working with differing regulations for worldwide bank accounts, along with various state and international tax laws. To maximize efficiency, employees work with third-party lawyers and accountants to provide the most up-to-date research and support to members.

The team's busiest months follow financial deadlines of the Toastmasters year. The month of June is hectic for the District Accounting team when they train new treasurers in district finances and ease them into the role they will play in the new year. “We provide continuity for districts because we have a history of previous-year transactions where the new district leaders may not,” says Bond.

The Finance team helps club and district officers maintain better financial records so Toastmasters can focus on the bigger picture: improving leadership and communication skills.

To contact the Finance department, call +1-720-439-5050, Monday through Friday, between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. (Mountain Time). Information for district officers is available at [www.toastmasters.org/DistrictFinance](http://www.toastmasters.org/DistrictFinance).

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For the Ralph C. Smedley Memorial Fund, email  
**supplyorders@toastmasters.org**

For wire transfers, email  
**financequestions@toastmasters.org**

**Editor's note:** This article is one in a recurring series about the various departments at Toastmasters World Headquarters.

▶ **SNAPSHOT**



## Suiting Up for Table Topics

Members of KT Talkers club in Milpitas, California, dress in “bunny suits,” which include a head cover, face mask, suit, gloves and boots, during a special Table Topics session inside their company’s semiconductor cleanroom. The club is sponsored by KLA-Tencor, a leading provider of semiconductor equipment and yield management software. Members wanted to showcase their company by meeting inside a “class 100 cleanroom”—an industry term for a room almost entirely devoid of airborne particles—where research, development and production take place. As one member commented, it was an exceptionally “clean” Table Topics session.

▶ **QUICK TIPS**

## Feeling Competitive?

Speech contests are a Toastmasters tradition. They begin at the club level, and then winners continue competing through the area, division and district levels. However, in the International Speech Contest, district winners advance to the region quarterfinals, and winners at the regional level proceed to the Toastmasters International Convention, where they compete in the semifinals for a spot in the World Championship of Public Speaking.

Each year, more than 30,000 Toastmasters compete in one or more of the following contests:

### **International**

Contestants present a five- to seven-minute speech on any subject they choose. All districts must conduct this contest.

### **Humorous**

Contestants present a humorous speech that must be thematic in nature (opening, body and close), not a monologue (series of one-liners).



### **Evaluation**

Contestants observe a five-to seven-minute test speech and then present a two- to three-minute evaluation of the test speech.

### **Tall Tales**

Contestants present a speech on a topic that is highly exaggerated and improbable in theme or plot.

### **Table Topics**

All contestants are assigned the same topic, which is announced to them by the contest chair without notice. Then they deliver an impromptu speech on the topic.

### **Video Speech**

A contest for undistricted clubs and provisional districts that follows the International Speech Contest rules.

To learn more about Toastmasters speech contests and changes to the *Speech Contest Rulebook*, visit [www.toastmasters.org/Leadership-Central/Speech-Contests](http://www.toastmasters.org/Leadership-Central/Speech-Contests).

▶ MEET MY MENTORS 

## Charlie Peet and Bobby Moodley

BY ORA PRIOLEAU

I have an alto voice that sounds nice when I sing, but not so much when I speak. In 2008, while working in online banking for Bank of America, my team needed a solution to a problem. During a brainstorming meeting I was too intimidated to offer my suggestion, because I was uncomfortable speaking in front of the small number of attendees—colleagues who seemed to have “made-for-telephone” voices compared to mine. I believe I was passed over for a promotion because I was afraid to speak up with my ideas.

So, later that year, I joined Toastmasters hoping to improve my vocal skills and develop a stronger voice. With the coaching of my mentors and many opportunities to speak, I soon learned that if I articulate my thoughts, speak with clear grammar and cut filler words, people do not pay much attention to my voice—they pay attention to what I say.

Once I joined Garland Toastmasters in Garland, Texas, both Charlie Peet, DTM, and Bobby Moodley, DTM, became my mentors, and more than a decade later, they continue to mentor me. They have a combined 64 years of Toastmasters experience between them, so I affectionately call the pair of friends the O.G.T. (Original Garland Toastmasters).

For my Ice Breaker, I told the story of having recently been passed over for a promotion because I was insecure about my voice. Afterward, Charlie reminded me that my voice is part of what makes me unique. He said if I had something to say, I should say it: “It’s *your* voice,” he said. “Embrace it; use it for good.” It was also Charlie who first told me that Toastmasters recognizes the importance of complete communication—not just vocal skills, but grammar, body language and demeanor. The chance to work on that set of skills is exactly what I was looking for.



Charlie Peet, left, and Bobby Moodley

Even though I was improving as a communicator, I thought about leaving the club a few times over the years. Bobby told me that giving up can be a big setback. “You will lose the confidence and social networking opportunities you’ve gained,” he said. I admire Bobby for his encouragement, leadership and devotion to the club. Bobby’s enthusiasm for the club is clear, because he always takes the lead in recruiting new members.

When I complete my goal of achieving Distinguished Toastmaster, it will be thanks in part to Charlie’s and Bobby’s mentorship. I am so grateful they are both still with the club. And that I am too.

**Ora Prioleau, ACS, ALB**, is an area director in District 50 and club president of Garland Toastmasters in Garland, Texas.

**Looking for a mentor in your club?** Ask your vice president education who is available to mentor you. To start a mentoring program in your club, order the Club Mentor Program Kit (Item 1163) at [www.toastmasters.org/Shop](http://www.toastmasters.org/Shop).

**WANT TO NOMINATE AN EXCEPTIONAL MENTOR?**

Nominate your mentor by emailing your story and a photo (1MB or larger) to [MentorMoment@toastmasters.org](mailto:MentorMoment@toastmasters.org).

▶ NEWS FROM TI

## Newly Translated Materials

The “Find Your Voice” and “Your Path to Leadership” brochures, as well as the “Navigating Pathways” flier, have recently been translated into the nine languages Toastmasters currently offers: Arabic, French, German, Japanese, Portuguese, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, Spanish and Tamil. Hand out these essential marketing materials to prospective members in their native language and turn them toward Toastmasters.

Visit [www.toastmasters.org/Resources/Resource-Library](http://www.toastmasters.org/Resources/Resource-Library) to find the latest translated materials.







## ▶ HUMOR TIPS

# Topical One-Liners Bring Levity and Instant Audience Connection

Every night, millions of viewers tune into late-night TV talk shows and spend their last minutes awake hearing the voice of someone they trust. The power of late-night hosts is their ability to relate to audiences—you can harness that same power in your speeches.

The opening segment of most late-night talk shows is the monologue: a brief, funny rundown of the day's news. Of course, you shouldn't recite an entire monologue before your speech, but adding one great line that relates to your subject will get the audience on your side right away.

The reason is both emotional and practical. Emotionally, a topical one-liner makes you feel like a friend because it keys into what people have been talking about that day. Practically, it's easy to pull off. Topical one-liners are a laughter magic trick. Old jokes feel hacky. Fresh jokes feel spontaneous and show your ability to be funny on the spot.

Here are a few tips to become a one-liner magician.

### Find the Big Story

When you watch the news or simply talk to people around you, one story always stands out. Find the lead story, the one everyone in the audience knows. Humor only works when your audience is familiar with your angle.

### Keep It Short

One-liners, by their nature, are short and sweet. The audience is here for your speech, not your stand-up routine. A quick line will get them on your side, while a long story can feel indulgent.

### End on the "Laugh Trigger"

When you find a funny idea, editing is crucial. Humor comes from surprise, so the audience should be surprised by the very last word you say. Consider the following examples:

*"I heard Starbucks is closing 150 stores today. They're probably all on the same block, so it's no big deal."*

*"I heard Starbucks is closing 150 stores today. And get this, all on the same block."*

The second line works better because the laugh trigger—the words "the same block"—is the surprise reveal.

For your next speech, try starting off with a one-liner you thought of that day. Make it short and end it on a high note. People stay up to listen to late-night hosts tell great jokes. It's not a bad idea to give your audience a reason to stay awake for your speech.

---

**Nick Jack Pappas** is a stand-up comedian and comedy writer in New York City. He's one of the founders of **Comedywire.com**, a startup that helps businesses, brands and individuals find the funny.

## ▶ PATHWAYS

# A Path to Help You Win Laughs

It's a universal truth: Everybody loves to laugh. Which is why humor is such a powerful tool for speakers. Fittingly, Toastmasters' new education program has a path with required projects dedicated solely to that subject.

Engaging Humor, the 11th path in the Pathways learning experience, helps members develop their funny bone to entertain an audience.

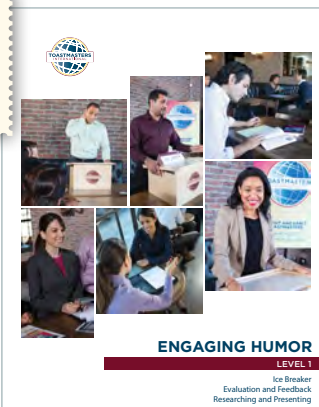
"Stories, anecdotes and humor—especially good humor—unite a room," says Darren LaCroix, Toastmasters' 2002 World Champion of Public Speaking, in one of the path's videos.

The Engaging Humor path is available to all members. It is only offered online. Its projects, which include titles such as "Know Your Sense of Humor" and "The Power of Humor in an Impromptu Speech," offer strategies on writing humorous speeches, using effective timing and pacing, crafting strong openings and even how to cope when your jokes bomb. (Tips: Don't sulk, don't be irritated with the audience, and take time later to analyze why some bits worked and some didn't.)

As with the other 10 paths in the program, members advance through five levels that increase in complexity. The projects include interactive activities and videos, which feature insights from experts such as LaCroix and longtime stand-up comedian Judy Carter, author of *The Comedy Bible*.

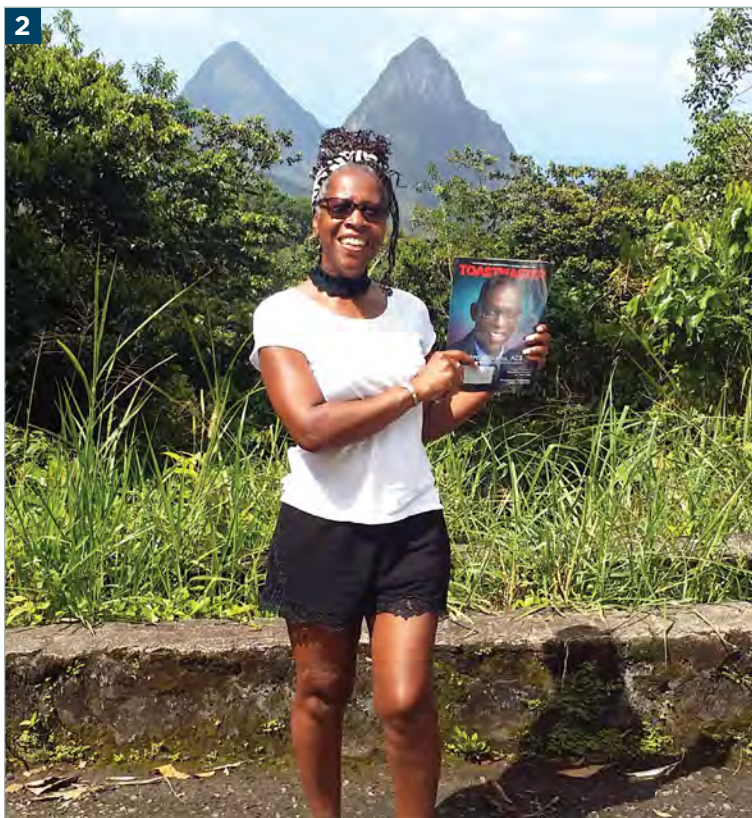
The humor path draws on many of the same concepts highlighted in the *Humorously Speaking* manual in Toastmasters' traditional education program. The importance of understanding and developing your own style of humor is a key aspect. So is wringing comedy out of personal stories and anecdotes that will resonate with your audience. Engaging Humor features a Story Collection tool in Base Camp that enables you to gather your own trove of funny stories.


For more information about Pathways, visit [www.toastmasters.org/Pathways](http://www.toastmasters.org/Pathways).






- 1 | **SOURABH ROY, CC**, of Newcastle, United Kingdom, takes in the view of the cerulean-blue sea off the Greek island of Santorini.
- 2 | **ANN LAWSON, ACS, ALB**, of Acworth, Georgia, poses in front of the volcanic peaks of the Pitons in Soufriere, St. Lucia.
- 3 | **JIM HUSSEIN, ACB, ALB**, of Sydney, Australia, endures the brutal sun of the Sahara Desert in front of camels in Morocco, North Africa.
- 4 | **LILIAN VAN DER GUGTEN, DTM**, left, and **LUCY SENNEF, ACS, ALB**, of Apeldoorn, Netherlands, show the online Toastmaster magazine on a rooftop overlooking Amman, Jordan.



 **View additional photos** in this month's *Traveling Toastmaster* photo gallery at [www.toastmasters.org/Magazine](http://www.toastmasters.org/Magazine).

 **PICTURE YOURSELF HERE!** Pose with the *Toastmaster* magazine during your travels and submit your photos for a chance to be featured in print or online. Send images 1MB or larger to [photos@toastmasters.org](mailto:photos@toastmasters.org). Bon voyage!

# ‘Hold My Right Hand’

An unrehearsed speech brings unexpected victory in 2018 Video Speech Contest.

BY BETHANY BORING

In March of last year, I found myself standing in front of my webcam, facing a virtual audience of Toastmasters. With a less-than-pristine kitchen in the background, I presented a speech for my online club’s speech contest.

My audience had no clue that I had changed my entire speech just 45 minutes before the beginning of the contest. My original speech had one clear message: “Do not judge me by my outside appearance.” I was simply going to share a few obstacles I have overcome in my life. But something felt uneasy in my soul. I felt a voice saying, *Why not share about the moments you needed someone to hold your right hand?*

For those who don’t know me, I was born with a smaller and shorter right arm and right hand than normal. I was tormented as a kid, and even today people are not sure what to do when they see “righty” coming their way. I’ve had very few occasions in my life where others want to hold my right hand. I get it; it’s odd, and I never want anyone to feel uneasy around me. But it’s never something I really want to talk about, especially in a speech competition.

As uncomfortable as it made me feel, I was even more nervous presenting this newly revised speech without any practice. Just minutes before it was my turn to speak, I put my youngest boy back to bed for the second time that evening.

My mind was scattered. My heart was pounding. But I remember thinking, *Even if I totally embarrass myself, nobody will ever see this video anyway.*

I also remember feeling completely free as I presented my speech. Even as I neared the final minute and noticed my youngest watching me in his underwear in the hallway (off camera), I remained focused until I finished.

That evening I won first place in my club, CompetitiveCommunicators.com—a result



Bethany Boring and her three sons

that caught me completely off guard. Then I was told that, if I approved, my recorded video from that live contest could be submitted to the 2018 Toastmasters Video Speech Contest. The video contest is for all unrestricted clubs, since they are not able to participate in the International Speech Contest.

Some may call me impulsive. My thought process was quite simple, actually: I thought, *Who in their right mind would vote for a mom presenting a speech in front of a wrecked kitchen, verbalizing an under-prepared speech while failing to keep her kids in bed?* I honestly believed it would go no further and moved on with my week.

Then, last June, I received an email from Toastmasters World Headquarters that changed everything. *Dear Toastmaster Boring, We are pleased to inform you that your entry, “Hold My Right Hand,” is our 2018 Toastmasters International First Place Winner ...*

I emailed back, just to make sure they had the right video. They did. And even more frightening: I was not allowed to share the news with anyone until after the announcement was made at the International Convention in August 2018. (That was hard!) I knew it would be impossible

for me to attend the convention in Chicago, so I waited to see if the announcement would indeed be made. After all, contest officials had weeks to change their minds.

On Saturday, August 25, my winning video was announced right before the end of the convention. My phone began lighting up with Facebook mentions, text messages and calls from Toastmaster friends who had heard the live announcement. Finally, I could talk about it and share my excitement. A few days later I was able to watch the recorded announcement for myself, and tears filled my eyes. Video submissions came from contestants around the world, and my video took first place.

Since winning the contest, I continue—both in online and typical community clubs—to encourage emotional authenticity in every speaking opportunity.

To watch Bethany’s winning speech, go to [bit.ly/2zqCe8L](https://bit.ly/2zqCe8L). **T**

**BETHANY BORING, ACS, ALB**, is a member of CompetitiveCommunicators.com, an online club, and Toast-Stars in Melbourne, Florida. She is currently the Area 23 director in District 84.

# Will You Be Ready When Opportunity Knocks?

How I ended up live on *BBC World News* to interpret the body language of Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un.

BY MANOJ VASUDEVAN

**H**ow long do you spend preparing for your presentations? One day? Two days? Three months? I believe the right answer is a lifetime. Sometimes, when opportunity knocks, you have no time to research, prepare or practice—you need to count on your life experience.

On June 11, 2018, I was contacted about a unique opportunity. A *BBC World News* producer from the U.K. emailed, asking me to appear on a live broadcast the next day—a day that would witness a historic event: the first meeting between United States President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

Honored to be asked, I gave credit to my title of 2017 Toastmasters World Champion of Public Speaking and gave it my best. The BBC producer asked me to discuss on-air what kind of communication dynamics to expect in the meeting, such as the non-verbal signals expressed by the two leaders with their body language.

Like many others, I had been keenly interested in this geopolitical development for a long time, but I didn't know what insight I could offer with the event scheduled to take place in less than 14 hours. Thankfully, over the years I have learned to stay prepared and seize opportunities when they arise.

I viewed this invitation as my chance to play a small part on a historic day. I have seen many experts panic when

opportunity knocks. Consequently, I have learned to say *yes* first and then figure out how to deliver.

In a follow-up phone call, I asked the BBC producer, "What exactly do you want me to do?" She said, "President Trump made a comment to reporters that he can judge Mr. Kim Jong Un within one minute of meeting him. We want you to comment on that."

**“When it comes to media, it is important to know what to say, but it is more important to know what *not* to say.”**

I researched the two global leaders and reviewed video footage of their media appearances, various interviews and meetings. While I thought my understanding of the task was clear, something unexpected was about to happen.

On the day of the meeting between the two leaders, I woke up early in my Singapore home, and by 6 a.m. I was on a hotel rooftop overlooking the Singapore River. This was the location from which the historic meeting would be broadcast live around the world. The place was buzzing with activity. I told the *BBC World News* anchor, "I have already reviewed the video

and I am ready to comment on it." To my surprise, she said, "What video?" I told her about the video the producer asked me to review. She replied nonchalantly, "Oh, don't worry about that, we won't be asking you about that. We will ask you something else."

I felt like a student who prepared for a physics examination and then faced the prospect of answering questions on biology and history. In situations like this, it is important to trust your instincts, lean on your experience and use common sense. When somebody has assigned you a task, they trust you can handle it and count on you to do whatever it takes to make it happen. You must trust yourself and believe you will have the answers.

Lights on, cameras rolling. I was introduced as Manoj Vasudevan, human-behavior and body-language expert. The interviewer asked, "What should we be looking out for in the upcoming meeting between President Trump and Kim Jong Un? And what did you make out from the first meeting between Kim Jong Un and the Singapore Prime Minister?" The monitor in front of me showed taped footage of Kim Jong Un meeting the Prime Minister and other Singapore leaders the day before. I was seeing it for the first time. (You can never be *fully* prepared.)

But I trusted the skills and instincts I had developed over the years as a Toastmaster and public speaker. I launched



*Manoj Vasudevan, 2017 Toastmasters World Champion of Public Speaking, analyzed the non-verbal communication dynamics between Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un at their June 12, 2018 meeting.*

into my observations and analysis. In regard to the question about Trump and Kim Jong Un, I discussed the former as a seasoned speaker who has extensive experience with media and the latter as a leader with almost no experience on the world stage. Then, when visuals of the first face-to-face encounter between Trump and the North Korean leader aired live, I shared my thoughts about their interaction. I spoke about the cultural expectations in North America and the cultural norms in Asia. Later, I commented on Trump's decision to wear a red tie, his handshakes, his eye contact and other behaviors I noticed.

On the broadcast with me was Robert E. Kelly, an American political analyst and expert on North Korea at Pusan National University in South Korea. He leaned over to me and said, "You are absolutely

spot-on. We should catch up." That was a great validation at just the right time.

**"I have learned to say *yes first and then figure out how to deliver.*"**

I thought I was done, but the producers asked me to stay. I was called upon to appear a few more times that day as events unfolded. Each time, I strove to avoid commenting on the political aspects of the meeting and stuck to my expertise on human behavior. When it comes to the media, it is important to know what to say, but it is more important to know what *not* to say. The following day I received an email from BBC producers with rave reviews about my observations and comments. I was flattered by that unexpected praise.

In summary, I would like to share three lessons in particular, drawn from having made this appearance on a global news network at very short notice:

- ▶ Stay updated with what's going on in the world—you never know when opportunity will knock.
- ▶ Be willing to seize opportunities that arise, because you can't grow if you don't step outside your comfort zone.
- ▶ The world needs to hear your views, because your views matter! **T**

**Manoj Vasudevan, ACS, CL**, is an expert on next-level leadership, CEO of Thought Expressions and author of *Mastering Leadership the Mousetrap Way*. He is the 2017 Toastmasters World Champion of Public Speaking.

# Drop Those Crutches

Learn to let go of the ‘ahs,’ the ‘ums’ and other filler words.

BY JOEL SCHWARTZBERG

**A** client I work with frequently is a very strong speaker—she’s confident, powerful and very aware of her message. Yet, even with all that ability, she makes one mistake consistently and is mostly unaware of it.

She begins nearly every sentence with the word “so.”

“So, I thought we’d start by ...”

“So, I’d like to thank ...”

“So, my answer to that is ...”

“So” is her “crutch word,” a term we Toastmasters are very familiar with. In every meeting, the Ah-Counter is tasked with identifying, and delivering a report on, “overused words or filler sounds used as a crutch by anyone who speaks during the meeting.”

These include words such as “and,” “well,” “but,” “so” and “you know,” but also mere sounds like “ah,” “um” and “er.” Sometimes they include words such as “literally,” “actually” and “basically.” Whatever form they take, crutch words typically have two attributes: 1) overuse, and 2) meaninglessness.

Crutch words are never necessary and may even get in the way of you making your point.

## Why Do We Use Crutch Words?

Theories abound about why people use crutch words. In an article for *The Atlantic*, Jen Doll suggested we use them to “give us time to think, to accentuate our meaning (even when we do so mistakenly), or just because these are the words

that have somehow lodged in our brains and come out on our tongues.”

In a widely-shared *Harvard Business Review* article, Noah Zandan suggests that filler words come in handy when a speaker is “nervous, distracted or at a loss for what comes next ... These may give us a moment to collect our thoughts before we press on.”

I personally believe words such as “um” and “ah” emerge when our brain anticipates a void or an uncertain moment in our presentation and basically freaks out, quickly plugging the hole with a pointless sound.

It takes a lot of confidence to start a speech with a strong first word, so speakers sometimes start with “so” or “OK” as a way of easing into a talk, which may seem less intimidating.

In both cases—and regardless of the cause—the “fix” is unacceptable. Any part of your speech that doesn’t support your point will take away from it, even if in little pieces. And you always want to make sense, never nonsense.

## How to Overcome Crutch Words

If you don’t have an Ah-Counter handy, many digital apps now exist to help you discover and count your crutch words (the LikeSo app is one example). But simply knowing and counting

your crutches may not be enough. For many, using filler words is so routine and reflexive that asking them to stop saying “ah” or “um” by counting them is like asking someone to control his sneezing by having him count his sneezes.

The trick to controlling this habit is substituting another behavior in its place, or at least adopting tactics that reduce its frequency. In my experience, these four strategies can help.

### 1 Embrace the Pause

Most public-speaking experts agree that the best replacement for a crutch word is a deliberate pause. Whereas filler words create distraction, pauses have multiple benefits: They create suspense, slow down fast talkers, demonstrate confidence, draw audience attention and give speakers the time they need to communicate with precision.



Knowing these benefits, speakers should deliberately pause when they feel a crutch word coming on. It may feel awkward at first, but with practice, you will soon be pausing instead of using crutch words, and there's no penalty for pausing. Audiences rarely say, "That was a good presentation, but she paused too much." Like your sophomore year of high school, pauses are so uneventful that they are quickly forgotten.

## 2 Slow Down

Speakers often use filler words because their mouths are outpacing their minds. Words are coming out erratically and nonsensically before the brain has a chance to organize them into points. But when speakers slow down, they have much more time to plan out the precise phrases they want to use and will not need nonsensical fillers to connect random and pre-baked thoughts.

If you have trouble slowing down naturally, insert more deliberate pauses and raise your volume; both are countermeasures to fast talking. As a naturally fast talker myself, it's useless to tell myself, *Go slower!* But raising my volume and adding more pauses are much more actionable and effective.

## 3 Know Your Point


When speakers don't have clear points, they're inclined to ramble. Crutch words are then generated to connect these rambling sentences and ideas ("and, um ... so ..."). But if speakers prepare their points in advance and know them well, they're able to start them efficiently and wrap up once they've successfully delivered them, making

rambling and desperate connections less necessary. After all, if you start talking before you know what you want to say, you're bound to say something pointless.

**"For many, using filler words is so routine and reflexive that asking them to stop saying 'ah' or 'um' by counting them is like asking someone to control his sneezing by having him count his sneezes."**

## 4 Practice

When you're nervous and anxious, saying anything—even a crutch word—may feel more comfortable than saying nothing. Practicing mitigates that anxiety by making the speaker more familiar with the material. A comfortable and confident speaker has more control, enabling her to embrace pauses and deftly avoid the "ums" and "ahs." Practice may not always make perfect, but it can give you the confidence to make good public-speaking decisions.

Crutch words are not an indication of your experience or ability. Some executives use crutch words all the time, while some interns never do. But if you know what your problem words are and learn to control them, you'll be a clearer and more efficient point-maker, and that's always a goal worth aiming for. 

**Joel Schwartzberg, CC, CL**, is the senior director of strategic and executive communications for a major national nonprofit in New York City, a presentations coach and author of *Get to the Point! Sharpen Your Message and Make Your Words Matter*.

## 3 WAYS TO MAKE AH-COUNTING COUNT FOR MORE

As vice president education for my club, I feel responsible for making sure the Ah-Counter's report has meaning for members and creates more support than shame. To that end, we instituted three new Ah-Counter responsibilities:

1 The Ah-Counter says "five-plus" to indicate any speaker who uses a crutch word more than five times. This spares speakers the embarrassment of having their 16 "ums" and seven "you knows" broadcast to the world.

2 The Ah-Counter focuses on identifying each speaker's crutch words. Knowing which filler word you rely on is much more valuable than knowing you've said it 13 times. It also makes the Ah-Counter's presentation more instructive and engaging, and less like he's announcing contest results.

3 The Ah-Counter always encourages speakers to substitute pauses for crutch words, and praises speakers who use pauses effectively for control.

Remember that the Ah-Counter is not just a counter, but a coach. Use these strategies to both support and elevate the speakers whose "ahs" you count, because they're also counting on you.

# The Paths Less Traveled

Three global humanitarians speak out and lead in service of the greater good.

BY DAVE ZIELINSKI AND  
TOASTMASTER STAFF

**T**oastmasters founder Ralph C. Smedley said it best when referring to the ripple effect that membership in Toastmasters can have on those around us, on our local communities and on the wider world:

“While most of us may have entered Toastmasters to learn to make speeches, that benefit is but the beginning of the good which may come to us, and the good which we may do for mankind” (*Toastmaster* magazine, February 1955).

The members profiled here have lived up to that high ideal Smedley prescribed. All have dedicated their lives or careers to humanitarian work designed to fight injustice or discrimination, to help populations afflicted by natural disaster or violence, and to build a better understanding among people from different cultures.

These individuals have applied lessons they learned as Toastmasters to improve the impact of their humanitarian efforts—and they have learned a great deal in so doing. Here are their stories.

## Lesley Stephenson

Lesley Stephenson, ACG, CLB, of Zurich, Switzerland, has spent the past decade working in rural northern Ethiopia. What started as a fundraising pledge has become a way of life, with Stephenson now spending up to six months per year in the region of Raya-Azebo, where she represents a Swiss-based charity she founded with her husband 10 years ago, Ethiopian Enterprises.

Her work for the past five years involves funding and monitoring the rebuilding of a model rural school, overseeing projects at six satellite schools, facilitating a high school scholarship program, and fighting human trafficking and corruption. With a team of three other non-paid board members, volunteers in Switzerland and Australia, and an Ethiopian project manager, she oversees the overall administration of this comprehensive project.

Stephenson and her team have worked with the local government and community in rebuilding the large rural school in the region of Mehoni. “Nearly 1,500 children were being taught in huts made of mud and branches, 60 to 70 students in a class, often without any teacher at all,” she recalls of the early days.





Lesley Stephenson at the opening of new school buildings at Lemlem Baro School in Mehoni, Ethiopia. Photos courtesy of Ethiopian Enterprises

“There was not a drop of water at the school—neither for drinking nor for hand washing.”

The result? “Over the past five years we have built a lovely rural school around a rainwater-collection system,” she says with pride. “The students have drinking water. Rainwater is used for maintenance and for growing vegetables, which are sold at the weekly market in the nearby town. The income covers maintenance costs for the water system, classroom cleaning and other expenses. They now also have a library, and I’ve had the privilege of placing into the hands of many children their first-ever reading book.”

### **Alleviating Poverty**

Stephenson first visited Ethiopia 12 years ago as part of her Toastmasters High Performance Leadership project (HPL). She had helped raise money for a Toastmasters colleague who was building a private school in the town of Mekelle. After visiting the school with her husband, Thomas Baumann, Stephenson embarked on her life-changing adventure.

“Our mission is to make a significant contribution toward the end of poverty in rural northern Ethiopia,” she says. “In a country of 104 million people, that is a weighty goal. Still, over the past decade we have raised \$1.8 million for our long-term projects and so far have positively affected the lives of around 50,000 people.”

“Our mission is to make a significant contribution toward the end of poverty in rural northern Ethiopia.”

—LESLEY STEPHENSON



Stephenson joined Toastmasters in 2002 to enhance her skill as a professional speaker and corporate communications trainer. While her corporate work continues, she now splits her time between Ethiopia and Switzerland and uses her communication and leadership skills to advance the cause that has become her passion.

“My work with Toastmasters has helped me at several levels,” says Stephenson, who founded the Zuriberg Toastmasters club in Zurich, Switzerland, and has twice placed in the International Speech Contest semifinals.

“I have to communicate on a regular basis with local government officials, the department of education and even the police. I deliver workshops for staff members at numerous schools, and of course I communicate daily with many of our 1,500 students. I also speak regularly at school events and meetings. So my ability to listen and to present arguments and facts clearly is essential, especially when discussions are complicated by cultural differences and, sometimes, by interpreters.”

In addition to her educational work in Ethiopia, Stephenson also takes a strong public stand against corruption, which has seen her speaking out in Ethiopian court proceedings. “My Toastmasters training has helped me testify about serious issues like these.”

To learn more about Stephenson’s humanitarian work in Ethiopia, visit [www.ethiopianenterprises.org](http://www.ethiopianenterprises.org).



*Jim Luce with Young Global Leaders participants in Indonesia last summer. Photos courtesy of the J. Luce Foundation*

## Jim Luce

During a trip to Indonesia, Jim Luce visited an orphanage where he met a 10-month-old orphan who stole his heart and later became his adopted son, Mathew. But the squalid conditions he encountered at the orphanage left him stunned, and the thought of the other children there drove him to consider launching an international organization to aid orphans. Luce was working to get the fledgling organization off the ground, with the help of his mother, when his brother fell ill.

“My brother was dying from pancreatic cancer, and I visited him in Texas,” says Luce. “He asked me if I was serious about creating Orphans International. I said yes, and he said if that was the case, I would need to become a highly effective communicator and leader. He said I needed to join Toastmasters, which he belonged to as part of the software company he worked for. My brother then said he would leave funds for me from his estate on the condition that I join Toastmasters.”

Luce, CL, honored that request and joined the Roosevelt Island Toastmasters club in New York City, becoming club president within two years. In 1999 he successfully launched Orphans International Worldwide (OIWW), which supports orphan care in 12 countries along the equator, including Ghana, Kenya, Cambodia, India, the Dominican Republic and Guatemala. The group’s long-term goal is to end orphanages globally, eventually placing children in their own extended families.

Luce has raised more than \$1.5 million for orphaned children and, for that work, the U.S. Congress twice awarded him the Certificate of Congressional Recognition, in 2004 and 2007.

### Making a Mark

Luce began his career on Wall Street and says his parents, who were both social activists, influenced him to move into humanitarian work. He founded the James Jay Dudley Luce Foundation, Inc., in 2008 to train and support young leaders “to a place of empowerment for bettering the world.” It includes the Young



*Jim Luce (second from left) visits the New York State Capitol with members of the Young Global Leaders program to meet with state assembly members.*

Global Leaders program, which requires a 200-hour commitment of leadership training, as well as participation in a Toastmasters club. Inspired by Luce’s late father, a college professor who had a special interest in building students’ leadership skills, Young Global Leaders has graduated more than 100 students in the New York City area.

Last year, students in the program traveled to Greece to visit refugee camps and orphanages, and were each given \$10,000 by Luce’s foundation to spend on a chosen cause. Giving them the choice of how to spend the money, says Luce, “was designed as a values clarification of sorts.” The students ultimately decided to use the money to fund an all-girls orphanage in Athens.

The children from the first orphanages Luce opened years ago have now begun graduating from college, as has Luce’s adopted son, Mathew, who is carrying on Luce’s mission by serving on the foundation’s board of directors. The cardinal rule of Orphans International is inspired by Luce’s experience with Mathew: Each child in the care of Orphans International should be treated the way a parent would treat their own child.

To read more about Luce’s work with Orphans International and his Global Leaders program, visit [www.orphansinternational.org](http://www.orphansinternational.org) and [www.lucefoundation.org](http://www.lucefoundation.org).



Marielle Sander boards a United Nations helicopter during her work in Haiti.

## Marielle Sander

When Marielle Sander accepted a leadership position with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Haiti, one of her first priorities was creating a local Toastmasters club for her staff there. Sander had previously belonged to a club in Sweden that she found so valuable, it became the one weekly meeting she refused to give up, regardless of other demands on her time.

“I wanted to share the professional growth experience of Toastmasters with my staff and help them become better communicators and leaders in regard to our humanitarian mission,” says Sander, CC, CL, who became founding president of the Inspire Toastmasters Club UNFPA in Port Au Prince, Haiti.

The UNFPA is the United Nation’s sexual and reproductive health agency, providing health care for pregnant women, training midwives and promoting the empowerment of youth, such as giving children, primarily young girls, the confidence to succeed in challenging environments. The organization also consults with the government and medical professionals on issues such as family planning and women’s reproductive health.

The Toastmasters experience has helped both Sander and her staff communicate more assertively yet diplomatically in these settings. “We work on becoming better communicators, so we can increase the knowledge of these issues and arrive at a common understanding for the betterment of all involved,” she says.

### Early Start in Kyrgyzstan

Sander’s interest in the wider world was fueled by her father, who was a travel agent and took her to many spots around the world, including homes in Papua New Guinea and Bahrain.

“Seeing all the different places as a child made me curious about humanity,” she says. “I have been traveling the globe and been involved in international development work ever since.”

**“We work on becoming better communicators, so we can increase the knowledge of these issues ... for the betterment of all involved.”**

—MARIELLE SANDER

Sander, who began her career working as a volunteer for the United Nations in Kyrgyzstan, has since accumulated more than 15 years of managerial and technical

expertise in combating human trafficking, fighting labor exploitation and working to protect vulnerable populations like women and children at risk.

Because quality data is needed to measure the UNFPA’s progress against its goals, Sander and her team launched the first national census in Haiti since 2003—and the first since the catastrophic earthquake that hit the country in 2010.

“By this time next year Haiti will have a much better idea of who is living in the country, where they’re living and what their conditions are,” she says. “That will help the government better plan how to provide health and educational services, build roads and schools, and will also help guide the donor community in investing funds.”

Sander says her experience working with staff in a Toastmasters setting has paid dividends over her career and at the UNFPA. “Thanks to the platform Toastmasters has given us, we have seen a transformation in staff members taking control of their own destiny. It has given them an opportunity to see the potential in each other,” Sander says. “The important thing in this line of work is to try to make the connection between our highest aspirations and our highest selves in the work we do each day. Then it becomes easier to persevere through the challenges of trying to make the world a better place.”

These dedicated Toastmasters use their communication and leadership skills not only to advance their own lives but to comfort the afflicted, aid vulnerable populations and serve the greater good. They have chosen paths less traveled; they speak out and lead in sometimes difficult circumstances. In so doing, they inspire others to do the same. They walk the Toastmasters talk. **T**

**Dave Zielinski** is a freelance business writer and editor in Minneapolis and a frequent contributor to the *Toastmaster* magazine.



**ONLINE EXTRAS:** View additional photos in the *Toastmaster* magazine’s digital edition.



# Designed to Deliver

The Pathways learning experience is steeped in top-line instructional design.

BY PAUL STERMAN

**E**ducation has always anchored the Toastmasters experience, ever since founder Ralph Smedley started his quest to help people speak up with confidence and skill. Over the past nearly 100 years, Toastmasters' educational programs and materials have evolved and expanded, leading to its latest, most comprehensive program: the Pathways learning experience.

So it's worth asking: When it comes to education and self-improvement, what is the best way to learn?

Instructional designers, the people who create educational programs, spend a lot of time studying that question. What they have found, say experts in the field, is that adults do best when they are in control of their learning. They thrive when they can tailor their education to their own needs and goals and can successfully apply their newfound knowledge beyond the classroom or club meeting.

Those ideas form the foundation of Pathways. The team that developed Toastmasters' new education program drew on the most progressive concepts in instructional design. And members are benefiting from the results.

"My favorite part of the program has been the huge range of new, real-world, relevant projects available, which I've been able to integrate into my life and goals outside Toastmasters," says Mark Snow, DTM, a member of three clubs in Queensland, Australia. Several projects, he adds, helped him a great deal in his career as a government financial analyst.

Julie Kertesz, DTM, of London, England, has been working in Pathways since it launched in 2017, and she praises its expansive offerings and customized nature. As

she progressed in the program, she created storytelling events, blogged regularly and explored photography as a motivational strategy. Kertesz is 84 years old.

**"In designing the learning experience, the Pathways development team used the most current research in adult learning."**

"I am completely energized by Pathways and the people I have met through or because of it," she says.

## Paths and Projects

The Pathways learning experience is available to all members. The online program features 11 specialized learning paths, including Presentation Mastery, Dynamic Leadership, Visionary Communication and Engaging Humor. (Read about the new humor path on page 9 of this issue.) Although purchasing paths in print is an option, most members choose to work in Pathways online, gaining access to videos, interactive content and other tools and resources.

In designing the learning experience, the Pathways development team used the most current research in adult learning, says Sue Stanley, Toastmasters International's senior instructional designer. Specifically, the program reflects the following key principles:

- ▶ To learn best, adults want to know why they need to learn something. What is the value to them?

- ▶ Internal motivation is the driving force to learn. Adult education needs to be self-directed.
- ▶ Hands-on, experiential learning is key, as is a focus on critical thinking.
- ▶ Adults want to apply what they learn—to do something tangible with their knowledge.

Pathways, which contains a mix of required and elective projects, offers a personalized style of learning. Participants can tailor their experience to their own goals. And working online offers flexibility: You can work on projects whenever and wherever you want.

Snow appreciates the modular structure and wide range of elective projects. "The program reminds me a lot of my university degrees and the multitude of subject options I was able to select from back then, depending on my learning and career goals," he says. "I see that same flexibility in Pathways."

Wherever possible, concrete experiences are built into the program to emphasize the learn-by-doing approach that has been fundamental to Toastmasters' education programs over the years, says Stanley. For example, for the project "Managing a Difficult Audience" (in the Presentation Mastery path), members behave like difficult audience members so the person doing the project can practice handling that situation.

All new members work in Pathways as their education program. For all other members, however, there is a transition period during which they can work in either Pathways or Toastmasters' traditional education program, or both. The transition period ends June 30, 2020.

## Applying What You Learn

In each path, members advance through five levels, each one building on the skills learned in the previous path. In Level 4 and Level 5 projects, they apply new skills in tangible ways. For example, a project on event planning culminates with planning a real event.

The relevance of the projects has resonated powerfully with Snow, a Toastmaster since 2014. A project he completed on networking skills inspired him to attend a Professional Speakers Australia meeting, where “I made some really useful connections for my future professional speaking career,” Snow says. The project “Prepare to Speak Professionally” (available in all paths) provided Snow with the motivational boost he needed to write and deliver his first professional keynote on leadership development.

“I am completely energized by Pathways and the people I have met through or because of it.”

—JULIE KERTESZ, DTM

The Australian is so enthusiastic about Pathways that he became the first member to achieve a DTM in the program (that’s in addition to the DTM awards he earned in the traditional program). The requirements to earn the Pathways DTM include completing two learning paths, serving in various leadership roles, and completing the Distinguished Toastmaster project in which you demonstrate the skills and expertise you have gained in the program.

## Challenges and Growth

Another important aspect of Pathways is its robust and challenging nature. Advancing through the five levels of a path, and achieving educational awards and goals along the way, is an exciting journey but also requires pushing yourself, say developers of the program. You can learn up to 300 unique competencies in Pathways.

A member of online and in-person clubs, Kertesz—who has a Ph.D. in chemistry—likes the rigor of the program. Like Snow,

she has earned a DTM in Pathways. She says she has grown in many ways working in Pathways, noting, for example, how a project on negotiation skills helped her resolve a disagreement about a club issue with the vice president education. “Each project brings its own joy and learning,” she says, “and some came ‘home’ in my private life and helped me to look at the positive side of something I was just very upset about.”

Another aspect of Pathways is that speech evaluations are designed to be customized and more beneficial than was often the case in the traditional program. The expansive evaluation guidelines lead to specific and detailed feedback, and the standardized criteria help increase the consistency of evaluations for all members.

Snow and Kertesz say the instructional-design principles rooted in Pathways have

produced an innovative and engaging learning experience. What stands out to Snow is “the enhanced focus on experiential learning and self-reflection.”

The new program, adds Kertesz, “gives us a wonderful occasion to grow.” **T**

For more information about Pathways, visit [www.toastmasters.org/Pathways](http://www.toastmasters.org/Pathways). The webpage includes short videos that chronicle the history of the program, from its beginning to where we are today.

Paul Sterman is editor for *Toastmasters International*.



**ONLINE EXTRAS:** Watch a video to discover how Pathways is enhancing the learning experience of members.

## AN IMPROVED NAVIGATION SYSTEM

Since its creation in 2017, the online *Navigator* has helped new members better understand Toastmasters and the Pathways learning experience. The webpage explains how things work in Toastmasters and outlines the many opportunities for growth and learning.

As a result of member feedback, *The Navigator* has been redesigned and improved.

The revamped *Navigator*, easily accessible on any mobile device, is part of an extensive effort to improve the digital experience in Pathways. Since the new education program launched in 2017, members have offered a great deal of feedback, mostly praising the program’s content and innovations but also suggesting improvements for its online component. In response, Toastmasters World Headquarters is devoting more resources to enhance the user experience, resulting in the Summit Team, composed of members from



different departments, including Information Technology, Education and Research. The team’s first project was redesigning the *Navigator*.

The *Navigator* offers an overview of Toastmasters and its benefits, along with tips and detailed descriptions of aspects such as education awards, speech contests and club meeting roles. It also explains how Pathways works, how to use Base Camp (the program’s online learning management system) and how to take advantage of the program’s many offerings.

You can access *The Navigator* from the Toastmasters website at [www.toastmasters.org/TheNavigator](http://www.toastmasters.org/TheNavigator).

# The Benefits of Bilingualism

Speaking more than one language builds a strong, resilient mind.

BY JENNIFER L. BLANCK, DTM

When Gabriella Szilvási, CC, joined Toastmasters, she wasn't looking for a bilingual club. Saturday

Toastmasters in Budapest, Hungary, just happened to fit her schedule. The fact that meetings were held in Hungarian and English

was a bonus for the multilingual Szilvási, who is fluent in both languages, as well as German and Italian.

Szilvási's native language is Hungarian. She started learning English at 9 and German at 14. She learned Italian as an adult. With each new language, she felt changes in her personality.

"It's a completely different way of thinking," she says. "When I speak in English, I'm very open. When speaking German, I'm more analytical. In Italian, I'm more emotional, and in Hungarian, I'm very critical," she says. "When you're able to communicate complex topics in a language, you're getting into the emotion of that language.

"For example, the Hungarian alphabet has 44 letters. There are all kinds of tenses, and the personal pronouns are combined. The language itself is complicated, and that is symbolic of the Hungarian way of thinking."

Szilvási finds it easier to express herself in English than Hungarian, and she wants to develop her skills in both. Like other bilingual Toastmasters clubs worldwide, Saturday Toastmasters provides that opportunity.

The club also provides an environment to put what she's been learning into practice. As a trainer in neuro-linguistic

programming—how our thinking and language combine to affect our bodies and behaviors—Szilvási is focused on language and how it affects thoughts and behaviors. She also knows that the effects of bilingualism can provide lifelong benefits.

## Resilient Brains

Scientists have found that bilingualism rewires peoples' brains. Research demonstrates that for people who are bilingual—defined in most studies as the ability to communicate in two languages, but not necessarily with a perfect command—both languages are active all the time. Therefore, bilinguals are constantly making selections between languages, which develops more connections inside the brain. Additional connections create an expanded network—like an increasingly intricate spider's web—with more pathways for information to flow. As a result, the selection process for choosing words is more efficient and becomes easier.

Imaging studies, such as those conducted at York University in Toronto, Canada, and Pennsylvania State University in State College, Pennsylvania, have even shown that bilinguals are using different brain networks than monolinguals when making such language selections. "Bilinguals are using automatic networks that don't require much energy because they're selecting all the time. It's easier for them," says Dr. Ellen Bialystok, distinguished research professor of psychology at York University.

These selections happen in the prefrontal cortex, which is the front area of the brain just behind the forehead. It's the site of the brain's executive control for cognitive functions, such as planning, attention, problem-solving, decision-making and working memory.

Think of the prefrontal cortex as a reserve gas tank for the brain. When you need some extra gas, you can dip into your

Hei Ciao  
Hey Salut  
Spreek Bonjour  
Tao Hola  
Hello

**“There isn’t a single study I’ve ever seen where there’s a bilingual disadvantage. There’s no downside.”**

**—DR. ELLEN BIALYSTOK**



reserves. Bilinguals have more efficient networks—like more energy-efficient cars—so they require fewer resources. Monolinguals have to dip into reserves more often. “For most of life, that doesn’t make a real difference,” says Bialystok. “But later in life, when our resources begin to decline, and we become more reliant on the prefrontal regions, bilinguals have more resources left and have more resilience in those regions. They can keep functioning even if there’s a problem in their cognitive system.”

As an example, Bialystok conducted a neuroimaging study that confirms bilingualism postpones symptoms of dementia. While numbers vary, she and other researchers have demonstrated the delays can average four years or more. Scientists have also found that, in the early stages of Alzheimer’s disease, bilinguals maintain cognitive function within the normal range and show no symptoms of dementia; monolinguals in the same stage of the disease show symptoms.

**“Don’t drop your native language. Speak it to your children. It’s the best present you can give to them.”**

—DR. THOMAS BAK

Studies led by Dr. Thomas Bak, a cognitive neuroscientist and clinician at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, indicate that bilinguals recover cognitive function after a stroke more than twice as often as monolinguals. While both have the same risk of developing aphasia—a disorder that interferes with a person’s ability to process and use language—monolinguals are more likely to have a more severe form of the condition.

Suzanne Holm, occupational therapist and professor at Regis University in Denver, Colorado, calls bilingualism a “cognitive enhancement.” When she was a practicing occupational therapist, she worked mainly with individuals after traumatic brain injury. “In working with our clients, we would want to know if they were bilingual, because then they would already have the cognitive reserve that could boost their recovery.”

### Stronger Focus

Bilingualism also helps people pay attention to what’s relevant and focus when there’s a distraction. “It sounds like a trivial thing, but attention is the central aspect of cognition,” says Bialystok, a research professor in Toronto. “Attention develops early in infancy and matures throughout childhood. In older age, when we start to struggle with memory, attention is at the heart of everything significant of cognition.”

Bialystok was initially studying children and how they develop cognitively. “Dual language proficiency was leading to differences that I couldn’t explain by other means,” she says. She began to study bilingualism in children and later expanded that to adults. Now she’s looking at the lifecycle and what’s happening inside the brain.

### Evolution of Research

Bilingualism research began in the late 1960s. For the first 20–30 years, most studies focused on children. More recently, scientists have shifted their focus to include the entire lifespan. In that time, our understanding of the brain has evolved. “We now have a much more dynamic understanding of the brain, its networks and connections,” says Bak. “Learning a language is all about brain connections.”

In fact, Bak found that you don’t have to be fluent in two languages to reap some of the brain benefits. In one study, he found measurable improved attention in people after just one week of language instruction. Those who practiced a new language five hours a week over nine months maintained the positive effects.

### Steps for Brain Health

“I don’t know if the average person is thinking about building their cognitive capacity and reserve every day, but I wonder if we will start thinking in those ways,” says Holm. She cites increasing rates of Alzheimer’s disease and dementia, and the resulting difficulty people will have living alone and aging in place. As more are affected, Holm says that people may become more aware and informed about brain health and consider “specific actions they can take that will be cognitively enhancing or brain protecting.”

For Szilvási and the thousands of bilingual and multilingual Toastmasters, they are ahead of the game. And their Toastmasters experience is helping, as many use their different languages at bilingual clubs all around the world.

At least 5 percent of all Toastmasters clubs worldwide operate in more than one language. Some clubs alternate languages from meeting to meeting. Others allow different languages to be spoken during a meeting and sometimes even during a single presentation. Either way, bilingual club members are following some of the most important recommendations for brain health—practicing multiple languages, engaging in lifelong learning and staying mentally active.

“The active brain comes for free for all bilinguals,” says Bialystok. “There isn’t a single study I’ve ever seen where there’s a bilingual disadvantage. There’s no downside.” Bialystok, Bak and Holm all recommend staying engaged. They all also recommend teaching children more than one language, especially if parents speak two languages.

“Don’t drop your native language,” says Bak. “Speak it to your children. It’s the best present you can give them.” In fact, Bak notes that when bilingual or multilingual people become elderly, they often revert to their native language. Sometimes their children or grandchildren can’t speak the language and can’t communicate with them. He says, “It’s never too late to learn another language.” Good news for brains everywhere. **T**

**Jennifer L. Blanck, DTM**, is a member of Skyline Toastmasters in Denver, Colorado, and a regular contributor to the *Toastmaster* magazine.





Members of the Miracle Chinese English Bilingual Toastmasters in Oakville, Ontario, Canada.

## Two Ways to Say It

Bilingual clubs provide a safe space for members to practice public speaking in a new language.

BY JENNIFER L. BLANCK, DTM

**B**ilingual Toastmasters clubs—and even some multilingual ones—exist all around the world. There are at least 850 bilingual or multilingual clubs worldwide. These clubs are typically chartered to help members improve speaking a second or third language, or to develop public-speaking skills in their native language while living outside their country.

### Improving a Second Language

At Miracle Chinese English Bilingual Toastmasters in Oakville, Ontario, Canada, both Mandarin and English are spoken at meetings. The founders created the club to provide a comfortable and friendly environment for Chinese expatriates in the community who still struggle with English after living in Canada for many years.

Ping Ge, ACS, ALB, joined the club to practice and improve her English. “Behind every language is a rich culture,” she says. “I always want to learn a new language to

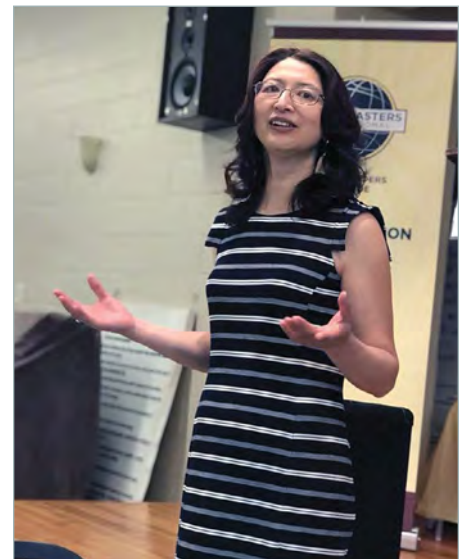
understand the country, the culture and its people better. Knowing a language well opens doors.”

Ge studied English and commerce at university in China and completed further studies in the U.K. “I had a dream to practice English in English-speaking countries and understand culture differences by dwelling in them,” she says. “I immigrated to Canada because it’s famous for its diversity, friendliness, technology and natural environment.”

“Behind every language is a rich culture.”

—PING GE

At the same time, the club attracts people who want to learn and practice Mandarin. Those members have worked in China previously or have Chinese parents. Knowing Mandarin helps them



Ping Ge gives a speech at her Mandarin/English bilingual club in Oakville, Ontario, Canada.

communicate with family and friends or keeps doors open for future business opportunities.

Members can choose what language they want to speak for any part of the meeting or even incorporate both in one speech. The language the speech evaluation is delivered in is based on what will convey the message most effectively. The same goes for Table Topics and jokes. “Often one language will be more appropriate than the other,” says Ge.



*Gabriella Szilvási, who speaks several languages, including Hungarian and English, is a member of a bilingual Toastmasters club in Budapest, Hungary.*

### **Learning in One's Native Tongue**

While some clubs allow different languages to be spoken at a meeting or even during a single presentation, others change languages for each meeting. Malayalam Toastmasters in Muscat, Oman, alternates between Malayalam—one of the languages of India, and English—from meeting to meeting.

Club founder George Meladan Thomas, DTM, moved from India to Oman for a job almost three decades ago. He started the bilingual club to give people who live outside their home country, like him, the opportunity to work on their communication and leadership skills in their native language.

"I believe that to enjoy the real freedom of communication and leadership skills, people should learn in their first language," says Thomas. "So I encourage members to practice Toastmasters activities within their comfort language. Once they excel, they can practice it in any number of languages."

Oftentimes, people start the program in Malayalam and transition to English later. At the end of 2018, 15 Malayalam-English language clubs existed throughout India, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

### **Helping to Save a Language**

On rare occasions, some people establish a club to preserve a language. Trent Dallas, CC, founded Tōhī Toastmasters in

**"If you manage to make yourself understood, then you've been successful. Some mistakes don't matter."**

—GABRIELLA SZILVÁSI

Auckland, New Zealand, to help with the resurgence of Te Reo Māori, the country's indigenous language. In the mid-1900s, Te Reo Māori was dying out. Since the 1980s, government and community-based initiatives have been working to revitalize the language. Tōhī Toastmasters is a part of these efforts.

"Our name was chosen to represent our club's purpose and bilingual values," says Dallas. "'Tōhī' means 'to toast.' 'Tō hī' is your ability to draw and attract people into your speech—your magnetism and charisma. 'Tō hī' also represents a new beginning—to stand and, like the sun, have your time to shine."

"Speaking Te Reo Māori helps me connect with and understand my native Māori language and culture," he says. "Having the bilingual club provides a great way to experience the language in an everyday setting." While speaking in Te Reo Māori is encouraged, English is also spoken at meetings. Sometimes both are used when providing feedback to ensure comments are understood.

### **Focusing on Fundamentals for Evaluations**

When evaluating people giving a speech in a non-native language, especially beginners, it's important to commend speakers' efforts. Gabriella Szilvási, CC, a member of the bilingual club Saturday Toastmasters in Budapest, Hungary, says, "People are already stressed by the challenge of public speaking. Then add on a different language, and it's a whole new level."

She recommends praising non-native speakers' efforts and focusing on more fundamental mistakes to help people learn. "The goal of speaking is to communicate," she says. "If you manage to make yourself understood, then you've been successful. Some mistakes don't matter."

Ge and Dallas also emphasize encouragement for non-native speakers.

Because of the support she has received in Toastmasters, Ge has even attended a French-speaking club to work on public speaking in a third language. "My French is very rough. When I visited the French-speaking club *Chez Nous*, members were very friendly," she says. "They shared information on resources to improve my skills and encouraged me to visit as much as possible."

### **Pushing Yourself as a Speaker**

Ge urges people not to be shy. "Keep talking and speaking in the language you want to learn," she says. "When you feel too comfortable staying at the same level, how can you improve?"

**"Speaking Te Reo Māori helps me connect with and understand my native Māori language and culture."**

—TRENT DALLAS

Don't be afraid to ask for help before giving a speech in a second language. "Ask a native speaker to review your work. The person can point out any major items to work on," says Szilvási.

The most important thing is to keep practicing. The chance to practice another language while growing their leadership and communication skills is a benefit that bilingual members say they enjoy. Ge says, "To become a friendly resource for people to learn and practice a new language is one of the most beautiful things we can do." **T**

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**Jennifer L. Blanck, DTM**, is a member of *Skyline Toastmasters* in Denver, Colorado, and a regular contributor to the *Toastmaster* magazine.



# How to Run a Club Speech Contest

What you need to know as a contest chair.

BY BILL BROWN, DTM

**Y**our club president is looking for someone to run a speech contest. What are your thoughts? *Oh, no. That sounds complicated. I wouldn't know where to start.* Sound familiar? As it turns out, running a club speech contest is not as demanding as it may seem. A brief review of the basics can help you feel confident volunteering for this project.

As the club contest chair, your first question is, *Which Toastmasters speech contest am I running?* Each one is unique, and the differences are outlined in the *Speech Contest Rulebook* (Item 1171), downloadable for free from [www.toastmasters.org](http://www.toastmasters.org). It lists rules and outlines procedures for the International, Evaluation, Humorous, Table Topics, Tall Tales and Video Speech contests. (Note: There is some flexibility at the club level.)

Once you have decided which contest you are holding, your first order of business is to recruit contestants. Although this may seem obvious, it is frequently the hardest task. This isn't your job alone, however—club officers should be actively involved in recruiting members to compete. Make sure your club is promoting the contest weeks in advance to give participants a chance to prepare.

The rest of your responsibilities can be divided into two areas: personnel and supplies. Which roles do you need to fill? It depends on the contest and how many people will help. You make do with what you have.

You, or another member, must serve as the contest Toastmaster. The timer is also a critical role. Having two is best, but you need at least one. Ideally, you'll have several

vote counters, but if you are short-handed, again, make do with who you have. Two sergeants at arms are helpful when running Table Topics or Speech Evaluation contests, but you can get by with one.

**“If no one is experienced, don't worry, the *Speech Contest Rulebook* will walk you through it.”**

If one of your club members is experienced with contests, assign that person the chief judge role. He or she will ensure that the rules are followed, the ballots are counted properly and the appropriate paperwork is submitted. If no one is experienced, don't worry, the *Speech Contest Rulebook* will walk you through it.

You will also need additional judges. In some clubs, all members participate in the judging. Other clubs choose a select group of members for that purpose. That is your call, but make sure the chief judge trains any first-timers.

If you conduct a Speech Evaluation Contest, you will need one additional person: a test speaker for the contestants to evaluate. This should be someone they haven't heard speak before. Ask your officers and senior club members for help.

Now, let's consider the supplies you will need:

**Forms:** It is up to you or the chief judge to ensure that all documents are available, including enough ballot copies for all judges. You can download them from the Toastmasters website at [www.toastmasters.org/Leadership-Central/Speech-Contests](http://www.toastmasters.org/Leadership-Central/Speech-Contests).

**Table Topics Question:** If you are running a Table Topics Contest, you or a key member of your club should create several questions. Having options will make it easier to select the one question you will use for the contest.

**Speaking Order:** Immediately preceding a speech contest, your contestants will draw for the speaking order. Many clubs use numbered slips of paper. Others use playing cards. Be sure that you or your contest Toastmaster has something available.

Those are the main supplies you'll need, but depending on your club tradition, you may choose to order optional items—for example, trophies for winners or certificates of appreciation for either the contestants or all the participants. Go to [www.toastmasters.org/Shop](http://www.toastmasters.org/Shop) and click on “Contests” to find awards, ribbons and anything else you may need.

Running a club speech contest may sound like a large project, but it doesn't need to be. Break down your action points into component parts, recruit a team to help and get to work—one detail at a time. Before you know it, you will be ready to pick a winner. **■**

**Bill Brown, DTM**, is a speech delivery coach from Las Vegas and a member of Pro Toastmasters and Ahead of the Curve Toastmasters. Learn more at [www.billbrownspeechcoach.com](http://www.billbrownspeechcoach.com).



**ONLINE EXTRAS:** Listen to an audio recording by the author for encouraging tips on running a club speech contest.

# Keen on Communication—And Each Other

Couples share how they met and married.

## Linda Charbonneau Brisebois, DTM, and Raymond Brisebois, DTM

Hawkesbury, Ontario, Canada



### Mentor, Friend and Husband

*Written by Linda Charbonneau Brisebois*

After the clinical research firm I worked for announced its closure in 2010, my life as a single mom with two teenage daughters became difficult. A friend asked what was next for me and I had no idea—he then introduced me to Toastmasters. By the end of February that year, I attended my first meeting; it wasn't a regular meeting, it was an International Speech Contest. I was asked to be a ballot counter and said yes—then three weeks later I joined my first club, Les Explosifs de Laval in Quebec, Canada. The next weekend I attended my first area contest, then division contest and finally my very first district conference. I met new friends at each level along the way; we belong to a communication organization, after all.

During the district governor banquet at the Chateau Montebello hotel, I met the one who would become my mentor, my friend and—eight years later—my husband. Together, Raymond Brisebois and I visited clubs, and he helped me achieve my DTM in less than two years. Raymond has been a member since 2003 and has held roles as area governor, lieutenant governor marketing, and lieutenant governor education and training. I have been a club officer, area governor, division governor, club growth director and program quality director; I humbly think because of our experience in these roles, we had the skills to organize a wedding.

On May 26, 2018, Raymond and I got married. Of our 76 wedding guests, 54 were Toastmasters members! What a blessing to be part of such a great organization. To our Toastmasters family, thank you for the friendship.



Photo Credit: Stephen Gagné, DTM



## Michael Black, ACS, CL, and Reiko Daidoji

Nagasaki, Japan



### Celebrating, Toastmasters Style

*Written by Yuki Kosasa, club treasurer for Sasebo FA in Nagasaki, Japan*

Sasebo FA club in Nagasaki, Japan, celebrated the marriage of two Toastmasters, Michael Black, ACS, CL, and his beautiful bride, Reiko Daidoji, in Toastmasters style!

Tomohiro Matsuishi, CL, and I were co-emcees. Michael and Reiko suggested introducing the essence of a Toastmasters meet-

ing into their wedding celebration. Knowing that Michael, our club president, loves Toastmasters (he made a cake decorated with the letters “Pathways” for us at the recent club officer training), we were excited.

We created a wedding script based on the couple's proposal: setting up a speech segment that family members and friends could join in, holding a wedding version of Table Topics and assigning a “kiss-counter” who counted the number of kisses, hugs and handshakes!

What we cared about most was entertaining all the guests, including people who didn't know about Toastmasters. Our club members were happy to take on roles to make the wedding unique and enjoyable. The reception went smoothly, full of smiles and happiness. It kept our kiss-counter busy!

At Toastmasters, we learn public speaking, leadership, team building and time management. We gather and hold meetings twice a month all year long. I realize now that it is all training for our future successful moments.

## Tina Anderson, CC, CL, and Niroshan Dharmakantha

Colombo, Sri Lanka



### Marrying the Toastmaster I Adored

*Written by Niroshan Dharmakantha*

March 16, 2017, was a very special day. It was my area contest, and I had made up my mind to be there, although I had a dislocated shoulder. Having driven more than 15 kilometers (9.3 miles), I made it on time. To my delight, my efforts were not in vain. A Toastmaster I always adored but never had the chance to speak to came running in to play an “invisible role” that day. I was so excited that I finally got a chance to speak to her. There she was, Tina Anderson.

It was raining cats and dogs that day, so being a gentleman, I offered her a ride home. We had so much to talk about, which continued for the next three days until I realized she was the one for me. Asking her out is a Table Topics speech I will never forget. Fortunately, Tina had always wanted to marry a Toastmaster. Ever since the day we met at my area contest, we have lived our passion of being in Toastmasters together. Whether at club meetings, contests or conferences, being together is a dream come true.

Fast-forward eight months to November 30, 2017: Our wedding was attended by wonderful Toastmasters, including Past District Director Zameen M. Saleem, DTM, who was one of our marriage signatories. Our club members emceed the event and did the toast as well. They even performed a surprise dance for us.

I am so glad I have a mentor, coach and evaluator right at home; someone with whom to practice what we learn together. We take turns being evaluators and Ah-Counters on a daily basis. The skills and knowledge gained from Toastmasters go a long way in helping us carry out a life filled with love, joy and affection.



Photo Credit: Pradeep Rathnayake



## Chow Chai Khim and Lim Ruey Shyong, ACS, ALS Singapore



### Cupid is Alive in Singapore

*Written by Lim Ruey Shyong*

I had been determined to look for “Miss Right” since 2004. I was active in various social activities and also accepted attempts by family, friends and neighbors to introduce prospective girlfriends to me. However, Cupid did not want to shoot his arrow and find me the right girl until 2016. First, I needed to find a friend of hers. It was a miraculous moment when, out

of 200 people, I chose to sit beside Lee Kim Hock during the District 80 Mandarin Humorous Speech and Evaluation contests. Through our conversation, he knew that I was single. A few days later, he connected me with Khim, his wife’s colleague and a former member of Lee’s Toastmasters club.

Occasionally the stars align in exactly the right manner. We had so much in common! We did our undergraduate and post-graduate programs at the same university. She joined a Toastmasters club near my home. We also enjoyed the arts, cultural activities and nature walks.

When it was time to announce our relationship status to fellow members, Lee invited us to share the stage at a joint club meeting of District 80, Area V3, as he delivered the Special Occasion Speech: The Toast, mimicking a wedding ceremony. The atmosphere transcended as the audience realized that it was for real and started to congratulate us.

We decided to host our wedding dinner in a cozy town outside Singapore. On June 2, 2018, two dozen Toastmasters braved the traffic on the Singapore-Malaysia Causeway and traveled 200 kilometers (124 miles) to support us for the wedding in Muar, a city in Johor, Malaysia. I was glad to have my fellow male members in the Queenstown Mandarin Toastmasters club for being my groomsmen. They made the important morning together a memorable one.

Today, Khim visits my club and both of us visit other clubs together. Through Toastmasters, we have learned about dedication to excellence. Dedication means truly wanting to be together and wanting to give our best to one another. **T**



## A Toastmasters Romance

Table Topic: ‘Will you marry me?’ You have one to two minutes.

BY JOHN CADLEY

It has been reported—in this issue, as a matter of fact—that folks who meet at Toastmasters meetings occasionally fall in love and get married. I don’t doubt it. If sharing common goals and values is the basis for a long-lasting relationship, what could bind two people more closely than a mutual desire to win the World Championship of Public Speaking and place the trophy in full view so when visitors ask about it you can say, “Oh, that? Just some little award I won for being THE BEST PUBLIC SPEAKER ON THE PLANET. I’m sorry, did you say coffee or tea?”

It has me wondering—how might two people deeply immersed in the ways of Toastmasters communicate their attraction to one another? It has to be better than the way I proposed to my wife—with a PowerPoint presentation. I know, not romantic. But she was skeptical so I figured my only chance was to build an air-tight case with moving bullet points and flying graphics. Thankfully, my wife has a particular weakness for rotating type.

I know that’s not how a Toastmaster would do it, but then ... what if my wife and I had been Toastmasters? How might it have gone differently? Imagine I’m speaking at a club meeting in an

audience-participation Table Topics session—where my beloved is the only audience member:

*Me: I want to say something I’ve never said before.*

*She: You’re speaking with your hand in your pocket. Bad start.*

*Me: Darn! I knew that! I thought because I was standing behind the podium ...*

*She: It’s not a podium, it’s a lectern.*

*Me: Technically, yes—although some clubs allow “podium” if you put your notes on it and it touches the floor.*

*She: I wasn’t aware of that. Point taken. I assume tonight’s Toastmaster has assigned the theme of your remarks?*

*Me: This is more of a Table Topics thing—you know, kind of a surprise.*

*She: Table Topics? Okay, you have one to two minutes.*

*Me: What I want to say is ... I’ve never felt this way about anybody else, and I think it’s the real thing and I, uh, think we should think about, you know, making it official.*

*She: You need to work on avoiding filler words. You used “uh” and “you know.” You also used “think” three times in one sentence, which is excessive.*

*Me: Thank you for that constructive criticism. I forgot what a great Ah-Counter you are. Nonetheless, I’m sure you are aware that there is some debate among Toastmasters as to which is more important: style or substance. What did you think of my content?*

*She: I believe you said our relationship is at a point where we should consider making it official. Am I to infer that by “official” you’re asking me to marry you?*

*Me: Good job! You used “infer,” the Word of the Day.*

*She: Thank you.*

*Me: Oh, and by the way, your inference is correct. How do you feel about it?*

*She: I’m the Toastmaster for next month’s meeting. My theme will be “Accepting Marriage Proposals.”*

*Me: You mean yes?! You’ll marry me? I’m so happy I’m seeing colored lights.*

*She: That’s the timing signal.*

Now, I’m not saying Toastmasters talk this way when they fall in love. But they could. 📺

**John Cadley** is a former advertising copywriter, freelance writer and musician living in Fayetteville, New York. Learn more at [www.cadleys.com](http://www.cadleys.com).

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## CLIENT SPOTLIGHT - BO BENNETT, DTM



You might know Bo as the creator of FreeToastHost, the host of the Toastmasters Podcast, or the Founder of eBookIt.com. Or perhaps you never heard of the guy. Either way, you will enjoy his latest book, *Some Really Personal, Yet Entertaining Stories From My Life That You Will Enjoy and May Even Find Inspiring*.

What is a "normal childhood?" Does it include almost being murdered by your sister with an ax? Speeding around town in the back of a station wagon because your mom is chasing an "alien spaceship"? Being busted by the police for intent to light a pond on fire? Tackling your mom to the ground and wrestling a knife out of her hand because she was trying to kill your dad? While my stories may be unique, readers will be able to relate to the broader themes that are part of a normal childhood such as sibling rivalry, eccentric parents, doing stupid things, and frequently preventing one's parents from literally murdering each other.

Although some of the subject matter is not something one would generally laugh at, you have my permission to laugh. Social rules don't apply here; my rules do. It works for me, and who knows, after reading the stories from my past, you might be inspired to see your own screwed up past in a more humorous light.

*Some Really Personal, Yet Entertaining Stories From My Life That You Will Enjoy and May Even Find Inspiring* by Bo Bennett is available in ebook, paperback, and audio, at 

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Call us at 978-440-8364 or visit us at <http://www.eBookIt.com>.

# Better Navigation Ahead

The completely redesigned *Navigator* launched with user-friendly webpages to help you make the most of your Toastmasters and Pathways experience:



Click through it now at [www.toastmasters.org/TheNavigator](http://www.toastmasters.org/TheNavigator)

Currently available in English